



IMRE TRENCSENYI-WALDAFEL

16th June, 1908 – 2nd June, 1970

It was only some days before his 62nd birthday that Professor I. Trencsényi-Waldapfel, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and head of the Department of Greek and Latin Philology at the Faculty of Arts, Eötvös Loránd University passed away with tragic suddenness. A scholarly career with rich harvest but still promising numerous new and valuable results broke in half by his death prematurely. His scholarly life-work – as it lies before us interrupted but finished – does not make an impression of a torso. It is surely no mere chance that in his latest lecture delivered in the Hungarian Society for Ancient Studies on the 22nd May he called the attention to the problem of literary life-work as a latent and accomplishing system. Such an existing and gradually accomplishing system of organic unity even if not reaching the fullness itself was also his scholarly life-work from the very beginning. Humanism and Marxism – these two basic ways of looking united his full life and work.

His interest shown in sciences, artistic sense and passionate seeking of truth derived from his family. He was little more than 19 years old when his first scientific paper was published, and during college-years he mellowed a real scholar.

In the early 30s were edited his major programme-setting studies projecting the system of his scientific life-work: "Research of Humanism, Classical Philology, Hungarian History of Literature" [EPhK 56 (1932) 110–114], "Humanism and National Literature" [It 22 (1933) 15–19] and "Philology of European Self-Consciousness" [Válasz 1 (1934) 253–257]. In these studies the young scholar bravely took a stand together with Gy. Hornyánszky, K. Kerényi and K. Marót in a dispute on the tasks of Hungarian classical philology and for the humanist way of looking and evaluation of the antiquity against neonationalist tendencies: he layed stress on the great values of the ancient world from the point of view of the European and general progress and development of mankind, and he emphasized the unity of ancient studies without giving up the special national tasks.

Despite his grave life-conditions. Trencsényi-Waldapfel carried on feverish scholarly, literary and editorial work during these years. His ideas on the artistic programme of classical studies, talent to writing and translating poems formed a friendship with several outstanding writers and poets of this epoch as Attila József and Miklós Radnóti. In this period humanism became the centre of his scholarly research work. It was no mere chance. His effort to maintain the idea of *humanitas* had particular timeliness during these war-years. His "Erasmus and His Hungarian Friends" published in 1941, perhaps the most beautiful work he wrote, was as a key-novel his personal militant upholding the *humanitas* under the horrors of the IInd World War.

The experience of the world-wide catastrophe's hard times formed his consciousness of the moral function of philology and the scholar's moral responsibility that accompanied him during his whole path of life. This determined both his career and scholarly activity after the liberation. At that time he was awarded university chair first in Szeged in 1948 then in Budapest in 1950. In recognition of his scholarly work in 1949 the Hungarian Academy of Sciences elected him a corresponding and in 1950 an ordinary member. In 1950 he undertook with the humanist's responsibility for a short period the heading of the University and Museum Department at the Ministry of Education, then from 1950 to 1953 he was appointed Rector of the Eötvös Loránd University. By realizing university reforms he layed down the foundations of socialist progress in this outstanding higher educational institution.

These difficult tasks almost entirely absorbed his scholarly working capacity for many years, but being guided by the consciousness of the scholar's moral responsibility he was all the same who made a first attempt after the liberation at charting the new tasks of classical philology in our socialist society by publishing in 1948 a study titled "Humanism and Marxism".

The "Humanism and Marxism" is considered in a certain sense to be the foundation-stone of the second period after the liberation in I. Trencsényi-Waldapfel's life-work. While surveying the ancient history of *humanitas* most of the topics and problems emerged that he later on

dealt with separately and in details. His life-work as system can be clearly seen even here. During the accomplishment of this system a whole range of his scholarly works came to light on the history of classical literature and religion.

In addition to his highly responsible editorial, scientific-political and public tasks he could fill with content the frames outlined in "Humanism and Marxism" in three directions. Through his translations of poems and his studies for the general public he could realize the implanting of the consciousness of socialist humanism in wide social layers.

His research on the history of classical religion served for a struggle for the Marxist conception of the world. A series of his studies on the history of religion published by him separately before, was joined in a volume in Hungarian and German titled "Studies in the History of Religion". His work "Mythology" was published in several foreign languages and is regarded as the best production of this category in our popular science literature.

The filling up of the frames outlined in "Humanism and Marxism" was above all perfected in the studies in the history of classical literature. Being the testimony to his life-work they are of distinguished importance from two points of view, on the one hand they evidently prove his absorbed conception of the world in Marxism and, on the other hand they clearly demonstrate the historical conditionality in the development of the idea of *humanitas*.

His studies in the ten great classic poets Homer, Hesiodos, Aischylos, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Menandros, Terentius, Vergil, Horace were joined in a volume "Classical Character Sketches". Through the life-works of the poets he carried on surveys on the development of classical humanism. His representations clearly reveal the restrictions of the classical humanism and the unreality of the possibility of its realization. The latter forms the basis of the coming into existence of the golden age-myth in the ancient world putting the realization of the conditions of humanism into the unattainable distance of time and space. Though humanism could not be accomplished under the conditions of the ancient world, the great experience of the formation of the socialist system convinced him to believe that under such circumstances the *humanitas* should become reality.

So his faith in the realizability of humanism and the idea of the *humanitas* inseparately interlaces with his scholarly life-work. This constitutes the striking unity of his life-work as system and, in addition to his wide range of interest, outstanding scholarly education, admirable knowledge of materials, subtle methods of investigation the unconditional undertaking of a scholar's moral responsibility perpetuate the memory of his personality for all who could get acquainted with him.

J. HARMATTA